

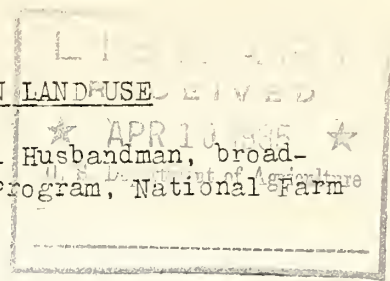
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LIVESTOCK, AN IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION IN LAND USE

A radio talk by C. D. Lowe, Senior Extension Animal Husbandman, broadcast Wednesday, March 20, 1935, Land Grant College Program, National Farm & Home Hour.



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The story is told of the Indian who discovered a homesteader plowing up virgin buffalo grass out on the Great Plains. "Wrong side up, white man," warned the Indian. That warning, we now know, should have been heeded. That Indian, whether he realized it or not, was a student of land use. Within sight, as he spoke, probably were herds of grazing buffalo and antelope making good use of one of the nation's most valuable natural resources -- our grass lands which yield a harvest, year in and year out, without aid of man.

Our greatest natural resource, of course, is the land itself. Approximately one billion of our nearly two billion acres of land is either in pasture or grazed. And of our crop land, 3 of every 4 acres are used to produce feed for livestock; 8 out of every 10 ears of corn are consumed by farm animals.

In recent years, however, we have found it necessary to put back into grass some of the fertile acres plowed up during the war.

"How much of my land can I afford to put into grass?" is a question on many farmers' minds today. The proper answer, for each farm, is dependent on a number of things: Size, shape, topography, and fertility of the fields, distance from market, investment in livestock, and other items.

The result of changing to more grass is less intensive farming, less erosion by wind and flood, less labor cost, conservation of the soil, and farm production more in line with the domestic and world demand.

And yet it is a project not easy to enthuse about because of its simplicity and because it is opposed to the natural tendency to make each acre produce more and more in the hope of getting the utmost out of it.

Sometime in his experience, many a farmer who likes to brag a little now and then, has had a "brag" pasture. But it goes without saying that it was not a piece of waste land with a fence around it. You know our English friends take pride in pointing out that they have their best land in pasture. At any rate, the man with a "brag" pasture has noticed what a reliable source of income that pasture field is -- sort of like his wife's butter and egg money. No crop failures. No rush periods for seeding and harvest. No worry with cloudbursts, early frosts and the like.

But have you noticed how hard it is to stir up enthusiasm over a pasture? If you have a field of corn that has averaged 80 bushels, or have threshed 50 bushels of oats or 40 bushels of wheat, folks talk about it; but a man can have a pasture that is making him more net profit than any other field on his farm and nobody says anything about it. In short, a pasture-and-livestock system of farming is one where profits are steady and less spectacular in exceptional years, giving a man less opportunity

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to boast, but bringing him more assurance of a steady income, one year with another.

It is interesting to see what happens when a farm changes from an intensive cropping plan to one of more pasture and grazing. Let us take, as an example, a typical Middle West grain-and-livestock farm of 240 acres, that is six "forties." Five of them will be in cultivation. About 15 acres will be in permanent pasture, 20 in woods, and 5, say, in the farmstead, including garden, orchard and lots.

Let us suppose that 30 percent of the crop land on such a farm, or 60 acres altogether, is changed for awhile from grain production to forage or pasture crops. The change is much simpler than you might imagine. Let us see how it is done, and what happens.

One of the five "forties" we seed to permanent pasture. Two more of them (preferably the two farthest from the farmstead) could be divided into four 20-acre fields for a rotation of corn-soybeans-wheat-and-red clover, instead of the former rotation of corn-corn-oats-wheat-and-red clover. Since the crops in this rotation would be harvested no division fencing would be needed.

The two remaining "forties" would be divided into "twenties" and fenced so as to permit pasturing and put into a rotation of corn-corn-oats and temporary pasture. This temporary pasture could be sweet clover seeded in the oats, with sudan grass for mid-summer pasture seeded in place of half the sweet clover the first spring.

The net result of such changes on this farm would be: 2,000 bushels less grain; 30 acres less to plow and plant each year; 60 acres less to harvest; 1,200 horse hours and 300 man hours less of labor. The livestock would be thriftier, cost less to produce, and their products carry less fat and therefore be more in line with consumer preferences.

One closing thought - As long as the average American's appetite calls for some 150 pounds of meat a year, we may take it for granted that livestock will continue to be an important factor in the use we make of our agricultural lands.

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